Newly qualified teachers' support needs in developing professional competences : the principal's viewpoint

Harju, Vilhelmiina

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Abstract

This study investigates principals' viewpoints on the support needs of newly qualified teachers. As pedagogic leaders, principals play a central role in organizing support activities for new teachers at local level and can offer insights into new teachers' situation and support needs. On that basis, we investigated how Finnish principals (N = 104) prioritized and described the support needs of newly qualified teachers. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire that included both closed and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and principal component analysis, and responses to open-ended question were analyzed using deductive content analysis. The study revealed that new teachers need particular support in working outside the classroom, cooperating with parents and colleagues and enhancing holistic support for students. The results contribute to knowledge of salient issues in planning and organising school-based support for new teachers, as well as in initial teacher education.

Keywords: newly qualified teachers, principals, professional development, teacher competences, lifelong learning

Introduction

When newly qualified teachers enter working life, they encounter many new situations and practices that differ from their experiences in initial teacher education. Although teacher training programs provide a strong base for the teaching profession, they cannot completely prepare prospective teachers for a complex, multifaceted and constantly changing working life (see e.g., Bezzina 2006; Livingston 2014).

A number of studies have stressed the special nature of the first years of teaching (e.g., Wang, Odell, and Schwill 2008; Moran, Dallat, and Abbott 1999). In their early career, feelings of uncertainty are quite common, as beginning teachers still lack the expertise and knowhow that develops through experience and practice (Menon 2012). There is also huge learning potential during this period, as much of the new teacher's competence, knowledge and understanding is still acquired at work (Grimsæth, Nordvik, and Bergsvik 2008). For that reason, the beginning teacher's early career can be seen as an essential part of professional development, shaping the newly qualified teacher's professional engagement in lifelong learning (Conway et al. 2009).

Research has highlighted the importance of providing support for new teachers to enhance their professional learning and to ease the challenges faced during their first years as a teacher (Bezzina 2006; Chong et al. 2012; Engvik and Emstad 2017). In order to build meaningful support activities for new teachers, it is essential to identify the aspects of teaching that new teachers find difficult or challenging at the beginning of their career (Conway et al. 2009). Support from colleagues is often considered crucial. Along with other members of the school community, principals, referring to school leaders in this study, have a major influence on new teachers' experiences, confidence, and learning opportunities (see e.g., Aspfors and Bondas 2013; Chong et al. 2012; Engvik and Emstad 2017; Grimsæth, Nordvik, and Bergsvik 2008).

Several earlier studies have investigated new teachers' needs from the viewpoint of new teachers (e.g., Gaikhorst et al. 2017; Harju and Niemi 2016; Menon 2012; Schuck et al. 2018), but less attention has been paid to the perspectives of other

members of the school community, including principals. Although new teachers are experts in relation to their own situation, principals' experiences can enrich our understanding of support needs. Approaching the topic from the principals' perspective, it is possible to examine the situation of new teachers at school level. Principals have accumulated experience of supporting new teachers over several years, giving them deeper insights into teachers' work and their learning and support needs.

In this context, the purpose of the present study is to investigate how principals prioritize and experience newly qualified teachers' support needs in respect of professional competences. For present purposes, newly qualified teachers were defined as teachers having less than five years' working experience as a teacher following graduation (see also e.g. Gaikhorst et al. 2017; Menon 2012). The first five years have been seen as the most important years for teachers' retention at work (e.g., Hammerness 2008; Lindqvist, Nordänger, and Carlsson 2014), and they are also perceived as a special time of professional development in the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD 2014). The study was set in Finland, where principals, as pedagogical leaders, play a central role in facilitating, supporting and developing activities for new teachers. By identifying support needs and exploring them using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the aim is to develop a comprehensive and detailed description of new teachers' situation and of the contemporary school as a working environment.

Newly qualified teachers and principals in the Finnish educational context

In Finland, all basic education and general upper secondary school teachers are required to complete a five-year university-based master's degree in order to obtain a formal teaching qualification. Finnish teacher education emphasizes a research orientation and transversal competence, in such area as communication, self-regulation, social competences, and learning to learn skills (see, e.g., European Commission 2018). As described by Lavonen, Korhonen, and Juuti (2015), educational programs aim to help student teachers to acquire competences that include:

- a high-quality knowledge base in subject, pedagogical and moral knowledge;
- social, network and partnership skills; and
- lifelong learning skills, including research skills and development of one's own teaching, the teaching profession and curricula.

In Finland, teachers enjoy great autonomy (see e.g., Tirri 2014) and have the freedom to make their own pedagogical choices in the classroom, within the frameworks of national and local curricula. According to Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al. (2014, 25), teachers 'decide which goals and content they emphasize, what kinds of methods and materials they choose and how they arrange and create innovative learning environments.'

In combination with the complex nature of the profession, this wide autonomy may cause anxiety and concern at the beginning of the teacher's career. However, Finland still has no systematic, state-wide program for supporting beginning teachers during their first years of teaching. Instead, support for new teachers is organized locally by municipalities and individual schools (Jokinen et al. 2008).

This lack of a formal support system for new teachers means that the role of the school community—and especially of principals—in creating and providing support is all the more important. Aspfors and Bondas (2013) reported that new teachers in Finland found leadership at school level essential for support during their early career. This aligns with studies in other countries, which suggest that principals play a crucial role, for example, in socialising newly qualified teachers into the teaching profession (Engvik and Emstad 2017) and in creating and maintaining positive teaching and learning environments in schools (Bredeson and Johansson 2000).

In Finland, pedagogical leadership is a central element of school leadership (see e.g., Lahtero and Kuusilehto-Awale 2015), encompassing the whole school community from students to teachers. As defined by Sergiovanni (1998, 38), pedagogical leadership can be understood as 'capacity building by developing social and academic capital for students and intellectual and professional capital for teachers.' The main focus is on the students: According to the Finnish National Agency of Education (FNAE 2015a), supporting teachers in their professional development facilitates the main goal of teaching, which is student learning.

Lahtero and Kuusilehto-Awale (2015) divided pedagogical leadership into direct and indirect leading and managing. Direct leadership relates to quality of teaching and implementation of the curriculum. For example, principals are responsible for setting work objectives, ensuring the quality of teaching and supporting and leading teachers' learning and professional development. Indirect leadership means ensuring the conditions for good teaching and learning—for example, through strategic resourcing,

advancing creative learning culture and executing shared leadership within the work community (see also e.g., Niemi, Kynäslahti, and Vahtivuori-Hänninen 2013). Principals' impact on teachers and school culture is also partly indirect. As Hanhimäki and Tirri (2008) pointed out, principals have an influence on the school's ethos and serve as role models for the community, even when they do not consider themselves to do so.

Newly qualified teachers' support needs in respect of professional teacher competences

Professional learning is a continuous process. During this process, teachers acquire competences (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that enable them to participate actively in the school community (see e.g., Caena 2014; Hakkarainen et al. 2013). According to Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, and Hökkä (2015), gained knowledge, unique work experience, and competences create the possibilities for teachers to act, make choices, and take stances in a school community. The European Commission (2013) distinguishes between *teaching* and *teacher* competences. Teaching competences are defined as classroom activities focused on teaching a class. Teacher competences, on the other hand, 'imply a wider, systemic view of teacher professionalism that is realised and implemented on multiple levels: the individual, the school, the local community and professional networks' (European Commission 2013, 10; see also Caena 2014).

Previous research has established that many of the challenges faced by new teachers relate to activities in the classroom. For example, Bezzina (2006) reported the

challenges of coping with class discipline, mixed ability classes and curriculum demands. In their study of school leaders evaluating new teachers' competences, Chong et al. (2012) reported similar findings, highlighting assessment and feedback, instructional strategies and classroom management as areas of improvement.

However, new teachers' challenges are not confined to tasks inside the classroom. In their study of newly qualified teachers from Finland, the United Kingdom, Portugal and Belgium, Harju and Niemi (2016) noted a need for support in addressing conflict situations such as bullying. The Finnish teachers also expressed a need for more support in working with student welfare groups, which are multi-professional groups that help students in difficulty. Their findings also indicated that new teachers would like more support in mastering broad teacher competences such as supporting students' comprehensive growth and revising learning environments. These competences entail creativity and collaboration between different members of the school community.

In a broader perspective on new teachers' needs and challenges, Menon (2012) noted that the problems encountered by new teachers related to the need to adjust to the organizational setting and the realities of the school. Similarly, in a qualitative study of school leaders' experiences of new teachers' competences, Grimsæth, Nordvik, and Bergsvik (2008) reported that school leaders identified a lack of clarity in new teachers' knowledge of the school system, school organization and school culture. Leaders also highlighted the importance of developing qualities such as leadership, authority, social competence, and independence. In addition, new teachers were seen to need support and practice in cooperating with parents.

Objective

The present study focused on principals' views about the support needs of newly qualified teachers in respect of professional competences. Here, teaching is understood as a broad, multifaceted profession entailing a wide range of competences. The research question was as follows: *For which teacher competences do Finnish principals see new teachers as needing more support, further training, or professional development?*

Participants

The study data were collected from Finnish principals during the autumn of 2016. To begin, an e-questionnaire was sent to principals through the Finnish principals' association, which has more than 800 registered members. As the number of respondents was low, the questionnaire was also sent by email to 250 principals chosen by simple random sampling. The selected principals were working in comprehensive and general upper secondary schools in different parts of Finland. In total, 106 principals responded. As two of the respondents completed only the background information, their responses were excluded, leaving 104 responses to be analysed.

Instead of aiming to get a statistically generalizable picture of the situation of Finland, the aim of this study was to acquire a more detailed understanding of the multifaceted nature of new teachers' situations and the competences and support required during their first years at work (see, e.g., Denscombe 2014). In order to reach this aim,

principals with diverse backgrounds and from various parts of Finland were asked to respond to the questionnaire.

In the final sample, 51 were female and 53 were male. Of these, 66.3% respondents were over 50 years old; 93.3% held at least a master's degree; 95.2% had accomplished an examination in school administration or at minimum a 25 ECTS administration course at a university; and 54.8% had more than 10 years of working experience as a principal. Most of the respondents (76.9%) were working in basic education at either grades 1–6 or 7–9; some were also involved in pre-primary education, special education, voluntary additional basic education, or general upper secondary education, with 23.1% working at upper secondary level. Only six principals had no new teachers in their school at the time of the study; 79.8% reported having one to five new teachers and 14.4 % reported having six or more new teachers in their school.

Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: 1) principals' background information; 2) questions about newly qualified teachers' needs; 3) questions about principals' needs in supporting new teachers; and 4) open-ended questions. For the purposes of this study, sections one, two and four were used, and these are briefly described below.

In addition to background information, the instrument comprised 40 questions related to different aspects of teachers' professional competence. The variables were built

around five dimensions: 1) Designing one's own instruction; 2) Cooperation (working with others); 3) Ethical commitment to the teaching profession; 4) Student diversity and preparing them for the future; and 5) The teacher's own professional learning. These dimensions were based on earlier studies and documents describing teachers' work (e.g., Commission of the European Communities 2007; European Commission 2005; Niemi 2011, 2012, 2014).

This instrument has been used in earlier studies—originally, in surveys of Finnish student teachers (Niemi 2012, 2014), as well as in a comparative study of Finnish and Turkish teacher education (Niemi, Nevgi, and Aksit 2016). In addition, it has been used to investigate the support needs of newly qualified teachers (Harju and Niemi 2016). For the purposes of the current study, the instruction to participants read as follows.

> New teachers face many new situations at the beginning of their career. Teacher training programs form the base for the profession, but new teachers still encounter situations in which support, counselling, mentoring, or further training is needed for professional development. How would you, as a principal, evaluate newly qualified teachers' support needs? In which respects you think they need more support, counselling, mentoring, or further training?

The participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale: *(1) Not at all or very little; (2) A little; (3) Somewhat; (4) Much; and (5) Very much.*

The questionnaire also included one open-ended question: 'In which respects do you think newly qualified teachers would especially need more support? How are the

needs of new teachers addressed in your school?' In responding to the open-ended question, participants could elaborate freely on their experiences and opinions without any limitations on word count.

Data analysis

The analysis combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Descriptive statistics were used to investigate the support needs of newly qualified teachers as perceived by principals. Principal component analysis was used to explore the dimensions of professional competences implicit in principals' responses. Deductive qualitative content analysis was used to analyze responses to open-ended questions, in order to achieve a detailed understanding of the findings of principal component analysis and to refine the formed dimensions (Braun and Clarke 2006; Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

One missing value was found at the outset, and this was replaced with a value defined by unconditional mean imputation. The data were then explored using descriptive statistics. To identify the most urgent needs, mean values of the various issues were identified and listed in descending order.

The aim of the principal component analysis was to explore the structure of professional competences—that is, the dimensions of professional competences that could be identified from the data and the emphasis placed on each of these dimensions in the participants' responses. Given the information from previous studies (Niemi 2012, 2014; Harju and Niemi 2016) about the possible structure of these dimensions, the data were first analysed using confirmatory analysis by extracting the specified

number of dimensions (five and eight). However, as these earlier models did not yield a suitable structure for the dimensions identified here, the number of dimensions was left open.

Using principal component analysis and oblimin rotation, nine dimensions were initially derived for the 40 items. However, as Cattell's scree test revealed that no notable change occurred after the sixth component, a six-component solution was adopted for further analysis. The dimensions were acceptable on the basis of the KMO-Bartlett test, with values of the communalities varying between 0.424 and 0.792. The six components explained 61.55% of the variance, and they were named on the basis of the strongest items or overall content of the component. Names of the dimensions are shown in Table 1, along with eigenvalues and rotated sums of squared loading for the six-component solution.

[Table 1 near here]

The six-dimension model shared some similarities with models from previous studies in which this instrument was used. For example, the dimensions of *Holistic student support* and *Work outside the classroom* were almost identical to those in the previous study, in which newly qualified teachers' responses were analyzed (see Harju and Niemi 2016). Both analyses also yielded the dimension of *New learning environments*. In both cases, this dimension included the same variables, although some new variables were also identified in the current study.

Based on the six-dimension model, summative variables were constructed, using Cronbach's alpha scores to determine the reliability of dimensions and new variables. Reliability values were high for most of the dimensions (Cronbach's alpha scores varied between 0.850–0.906), with two exceptions: *Work outside the classroom* (Cronbach's alpha = 0.683) and *Cooperation with parents and colleagues* (Cronbach's alpha = 0.5). The latter dimension's low score may result from the small number of variables, as there were only two items in that dimension. The dimensions and constituent variables are listed in Table 2, along with Cronbach's alpha scores. These dimensions were further explored using descriptive statistics and also served as a framework for the subsequent deductive content analysis.

[Table 2 near here]

In the case of the qualitative data (principals' responses to open-ended question), the length of responses varied from long (about 20 lines of text) to short (one to two lines); most responses fell somewhere between. In all, the data yielded 10 pages of text for the deductive content analysis. The six identified dimensions were used to explore how principals' written responses concretized and deepened the dimensions' themes—that is, to investigate the support needs referred to in principals' descriptions. Thus, instead of providing a comprehensive description of all of the data, the aim was to take a closer look at distinct themes described by the principals (see, e.g., Braun and Clarke 2006).

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the limitations of the deductive approach include the possibility of a researcher's concentrating too much on evidence that

supports an existing theory or a model. This risk was acknowledged during the analysis process by our also taking into account the possible non-supportive elements that could be inferred from the data. However, it was found during the analysis process that the open-ended descriptions were very congruent with the six pre-identified dimensions.

The first phase of analysis was preparation: reading through the data several times to gain a sense of the whole. To clarify occurrences of the dimensions of teacher competences in the principals' descriptions, a categorization matrix was then created, and the data were categorized and coded according to this matrix (see e.g., Elo and Kyngäs 2008.) Table 3 shows an example of this process, in which one quote is coded as subcategories that together form the main categories. In this example, the main categories are part of dimension 5 (*Teacher as independent professional*).

[Table 3 near here]

Results

The identified 40 competences were first categorized according to their mean values. Focusing on needs most emphasized by principals, a higher mean value indicates a greater perceived need for support for new teachers. Table 4 lists the ten most emphasized competences; the complete list of competences can be found in Appendix 1.

[Table 4 near here]

All of the most urgent needs included competences that are largely attained and learned by active participation in school activities. According to the participating principals, the most essential support need related to working with a student welfare group (multi-professional groups that aim to develop and support students' welfare at school). Although Finnish teacher education programs include courses on this topic, the skills and ways of working are usually learned through practice. In addition, as the practices of student welfare groups can vary across different schools, context-specific experience is needed in order to function as a member of the group.

The principals also considered that new teachers needed significant support for acting in conflict situations, managing classroom interaction and cooperating with parents. Again, these competences are largely learned in real-life situations and require the teacher to adopt a consistent, independent approach.

Much emphasis was also placed on competences related to providing comprehensive support for students. Principals felt that newly qualified teachers need more support in evaluating and grading students and in assessing their learning capacity. Differentiating teaching and developing the student's whole personality were also considered important. These student-focused competences emphasize how best to promote learning and work for the student's benefit.

Principals also considered that newly qualified teachers would need support in developing the school curriculum and adapting to the school's changing

circumstances. These competences require collaboration with stakeholders both inside and outside the school and the ability to create, organize, and be renewed.

The structure of professional competences was also explored. In this regard, the aim was to investigate which dimensions of professional competences were to be found in the data, and the emphasis placed on these dimensions in principals' responses. The dimensions and their mean values are shown in Table 5.

[Table 5 near here]

The highest mean values related to the dimensions *Work outside the classroom* and *Cooperation with parents and colleagues*. Principals felt that new teachers need significant support with these competences at the beginning of their career. *Holistic student support* was also considered important, with less emphasis on the dimensions *Teacher as independent professional*, *New learning environments* and *Work in society and professional growth* (although these also achieved mean values higher than 2.6).

The contents of principals' written descriptions were categorized under the six dimensions, which are aggregated in Table 6, along with their constituent elements. Next, the qualitative findings are discussed in more detail under the various dimensions.

[Table 6 near here]

Work in society and professional growth

Some principals felt that new teachers would need support in working in society especially in creating and maintaining interaction with members of the local community and acquiring local knowledge.

Professional development was also seen as essential. The principals' responses described professional growth in terms of developing 'teachership' (referring to the quality of being a teacher), including the cognitive, practical, social and affective aspects of teaching (Smith and Ulvik 2015). This was seen as a matter of developing a professional identity and one's own work. It also included the element of reflecting on one's own understanding of pedagogy, the value base of the profession and issues of knowledge and learning. For example, it was suggested that professional growth leads to a change of focus; as one principal wrote: '"Teacher as the center" is quite natural [as a way of thinking] for novice teachers. Support is needed in order to develop "student as a center" thinking.'

Work outside the classroom

Several principals mentioned that new teachers would need support in coming to terms with the expansive nature of teaching. Teaching extends beyond actual teaching to other tasks outside the classroom, which were described as including, for example, tutoring duties, disciplinary educational discussions, writing notes and reports, collaborating with colleagues and creating, developing and evaluating the local curriculum.

Principals also felt that new teachers need support in adapting to the culture of a school community. In particular, it was considered essential to learn the school's practices and to engage with its aims and rules. As one principal described it, 'New teachers need information about the school practices. They have to know the "accepted routines" so we can work in line.'

As well as learning school practices and finding their place in the work community, new teachers were also seen to have a transformative role, and principals' responses stressed that development of the school community was essential. Among principals who suggested that support from the community enabled the development of school practices, one wrote as follows: 'New teachers need support in order to really improve and change practices in schools. A work community that has worked together for a long time may sometimes put an eager new teacher down.'

Holistic student support

Several principals wrote that new teachers need support in facilitating students' learning and schooling—that is, understanding and implementing support measures and school welfare plans, differentiating teaching and tutoring and collaborating with student welfare services and special education professionals. However, not all principals agreed; one argued that new teachers are familiar with these competences, and that it is the more experienced teachers with more than 20 years of working experience who need support in such matters.

Supporting students' individual, all-round growth was also considered important. Principals wrote that new teachers need to learn how to recognize students' individual needs during group instruction, how to support comprehensive learning and how to take a genuine interest in students, which also involves being impartial. In the following quote, one principal describes how difficult it can be for new teachers to see students as individuals and to support their individual needs: 'It is hard for new teachers to see students as individuals. There is a risk that all students will be treated the same way or required to do the same things, based on the wrong kind of impartiality.'

Cooperation with parents and colleagues

The support that new teachers need in interacting and cooperating with parents was mentioned in several responses. Many principals noted that meetings with parents can be challenging nowadays and so require certain social skills: 'Interaction with parents requires lots of social skills nowadays. Parents' excessive requirements, parents with mental problems and encountering children at risk of exclusion can break a new teacher quite quickly if they lack support.' In this context, emotional strength was also mentioned as an essential element.

Collaboration with colleagues was also considered important. This was seen to occur at two levels: at school community level, where wider plans and decisions are made, and at classroom level, where, for example, joint teaching projects may be planned and implemented.

Teacher as independent professional

Many of the participants' accounts referred to the support needed in setting boundaries for one's own work. As new teachers are often conscientious performers who try to work hard, perform well and meet the expectations set for their work, it is important that they learn how to manage time and set limits for that work. Emotional pressure can also come as a surprise, and some principals highlighted the importance of learning to be kind to oneself: 'Everything does not always succeed. [Support is important so that new teachers] are not immediately exhausted by different pressures and requirements. They have to learn to be kind to themselves—everything in every class does not always succeed.'

Competence in independent working was also seen as an important support need. This was seen to include such elements as making independent pedagogical decisions, managing classroom interactions and understanding the curriculum as a base for one's own teaching. In addition, principals felt that new teachers need support in developing self-confidence, managing their own work and finding and maintaining their own teaching approach and style. According to some respondents, there are several ways of teaching, and everyone has to find an approach that suits them.

Principals also felt that new teachers need support in learning to act independently in complex, challenging and surprising situations. As one principal explained:

> Situations are so complicated and students so dissimilar that the same rules cannot be applied in the same way everywhere. I understand that [new teachers wish to know] the standard rules, but life is just so complex that the

> same rule cannot be applied to different students and situations. New teachers need to think independently in difficult situations and act in whatever way seems best.

It follows that newly qualified teachers need support in learning to independently interpret situations and deciding how to act. The ability to adjust ready-made plans was also considered important, as days at school do not always go as planned.

Principals also felt that new teachers need support in developing accountability and responsibility. They also need to learn how to be a well-rounded adult for their students: 'New teacher need support for example (…) in being an adult and taking responsibility in complex and perhaps surprising everyday situations at school.'

New learning environments

Some principals also believed that new teachers need support in implementing the requirements set out in the latest national curricula. In Finland, the core curricula for basic education (FNAE 2014) and general upper secondary schools (FNAE 2015b) include such elements as transversal skills, multidisciplinary teaching and digital learning. According to principals, it is essential that new teachers learn how to plan, implement and evaluate teaching in line with the new curriculum—for example, more emphasis should be placed on creating multidisciplinary teaching and pedagogical collaboration.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify which competences new teachers need support with at the beginning of their career in the opinion of school principals. The findings reflect the multifaceted nature of teaching, as principals emphasized diverse competences and a wide range of tasks involving different environments and different people (see also e.g. Caena 2014).

The findings are partly congruent with previous research that has investigated the topic, especially from the viewpoints of new teachers. For example, Gaikhorst et al. (2017) also found that a high workload and parental contacts can be challenging at the beginning of a career, and Schuck et al. (2018) emphasized the challenges related to responsibilities other than classroom teaching. In addition, differentiating teaching and acting in conflict situations (Harju and Niemi 2016) as well as adjusting to organizational settings and managing the classroom (Menon 2012) have also been seen as important support needs in previous studies.

The support needs of new teachers that were mentioned by principals were not limited to 'technical skills' that could easily be learned and managed, although some, such as evaluating and grading students, might seem to be such at first glance. Instead, the responses of principals indicated the importance of more complex competences, such as working for the benefit of every student, that require time and effort for their development. In both closed and open-ended responses, supporting students' comprehensive learning was identified as an essential competence. Principals felt that new teachers need support in order to learn, for example, how to enhance students'

learning by recognizing each student's individual needs and by collaborating with student-welfare services and special-education professionals.

Competence in supporting every student individually is highly important for today's teachers. Growing diversity in social, economic, and cultural backgrounds (Alexiadou and Essex 2016; Gaikhorst et al. 2017) requires teachers and schools to find multiple new ways of teaching and working in the school community. As newly qualified teachers may feel stressed and exhausted under the pressure of high workloads at the beginning of their careers, more support for developing this competence should be offered already in initial teacher education.

Rather than describing new teachers' career-long professional development, principals defined competence and teachership at the beginning of the profession, emphasizing prerequisites for further professional development. For example, in their written responses, principals addressed the need to support independent working. Teaching was seen not only as tasks and activities but as an ability to manage one's own work in terms of the required attitudes, emotions, reactivity, and independence. Setting limits to one's work was mentioned in the context of enhancing emotional wellbeing and the ability to keep working. The requirements of responsibility and acting independently in complex and unexpected situations may be seen to reflect the situation of the teaching profession in Finland. As new Finnish teachers are plenipotentiary professionals in a school community from their first day at work, having the same responsibilities and demands as more experienced colleagues, they need from the very beginning to learn to be autonomous and independent.

Work outside the classroom was also strongly emphasized in both closed and open-ended responses. Principals indicated that new teachers need support in understanding the expansive nature of teaching beyond classroom activities. Learning to perform these out-of-class tasks, as well as the practices and rules of the school community, was mentioned as an essential competence (see also, e.g., Sunde and Ulvik 2014; Menon 2012). These descriptions can be seen partly as requirements for adapting oneself to a given context, but they can also be seen as reflecting the social nature of learning; in order to take part actively in the school community, new teachers need to know the rules and ways of working of that particular environment (see, e.g., Hakkarainen et al. 2013). The participating principals also highlighted the transformative aspect of teachers' work, noting that new teachers need to learn how to develop activities in the school. For this reason, new teachers should not simply be incorporated into the existing culture but should be supported in actively developing it.

Limitations and future research

The responses to closed questions do not specify why new teachers need support in certain aspects of teaching. Such support needs may derive, for example, from content deficiencies in teacher education or from the complexity and specificity of competences that can be mastered only through practical experience as a teacher. In addition, principals may not consider certain competences to be relevant in their school—for example, multiculturalism may not be a central issue in every school.

The open-ended question was used to gain a deeper sense of principals' perceptions, and the responses were seen to offer essential insights on the support needs of new teachers. These findings from the open-ended question also indicate some differences in how principals understand the 'need for support.' Often it was seen to be related to new teachers' competences and skills, but sometimes principals indicated that support needs stem from the characteristics of the school environment. Because of the differences in the ways that support needs can be understood, more interactive methods of collecting principals' experiences, such as interviews, should also be considered.

It should also be noted that definitions of teacher competences are not neutral or universal but are formed within a certain historic and cultural context (Conway et al. 2009). Although there are some common definitions of teacher competences, these are not static or generalizable (Caena 2014); as teachers work in diverse settings, their learning needs often differ (Livingston 2014).

Here, the focus was especially on principals' viewpoints. It may be asked whether concentrating on the viewpoints of principals rather than those of teachers themselves can provide reliable and meaningful knowledge on the situation of new teachers, but principals' role as the pedagogic leader of the school enables them to see the first years of work as part of the longer professional-development process. In the future, the viewpoints of both newly qualified teachers and principals should be examined side by side and in more detail to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the topic. In addition, different approaches and methods should be considered; interviews with

different members of the school community or a longitudinal approach in data collection could deepen the understanding of this topic.

Despite its limitations, this study makes an essential contribution to the induction literature. In this study, we did not aim to discover statistically generalizable findings and did not focus on any specific type of support method or system (such as induction or mentoring); rather, through examination of support needs, the aim was to find new directions for developing diverse forms of professional development. Identifying the professional competences for which new teachers need more support makes it possible to tailor supportive activities for new teachers and to develop ways of organizing support. Bezzina (2006) noted that new teachers expressed a wish for more resources, more teamwork and more possibilities to interact with experienced colleagues in order to ease the transition from education to work. Further research should explore meaningful practices to help new teachers to learn and collaborate at work. The present findings can also be usefully applied to initial teacher education. Although most of the identified competences ultimately require practical working experience for their development, future research should explore ways of teaching these competences in initial teacher education.

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Table 1. Dimensions, eigenvalues and rotated sums of squared loading

	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
Component	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**
1 Work in society and professional growth	15.354	38.386	38.386	7.727
2 Work outside the classroom	2.345	5.863	44.250	4.043
3 Holistic student support	2.024	5.060	49.309	8.394
4 Cooperation with parents and colleagues	1.820	4.550	53.859	3.125
5 Teacher as independent professional	1.711	4.277	58.136	8.208
6 New learning environments	1.366	3.414	61.550	9.313

Table 2. Dimensions, variables and Cronbach's alpha scores

Dimensions	**Cronbach's alpha**
1 Work in society and professional growth 23. Lifelong professional growth 26. Cooperative action research 24. Critical assessment of teacher education 40. Cooperation with representatives of cultural life 28. Postgraduate studies in education 25. Working as a change agent in society 39. Cooperation with representatives of work life	.885
2 Work outside the classroom 6. Administrative tasks (information letters, reports, etc.) 4. Management of tasks outside the classroom (monitoring students during their breaks etc.) 7. Working with a student welfare group 37. Acting in conflict situations (e.g., mobbing)	.683
3 Holistic student support 13. Preparing students for daily life 8. Developing the student's whole personality 14. Preparing students for future society 12. Differentiating teaching 2. Managing classroom interaction 10. Confronting school's changing circumstances 9. Developing one's own educational philosophy 11. Developing the school curriculum	.850
4 Cooperation with parents and colleagues 18. Cooperation with parents 5. Working in a school community with teachers and other school staff	.500
5 Teacher as independent professional 20. Independent management of teachers' tasks 19. Planning one's teaching 3. Evaluating and grading students 1. Using teaching methods 22. Commitment to the teaching profession 21. Becoming aware of the ethical basis of the teaching profession 30. Evaluating students' learning capacity 17. Self-evaluation of one's own teaching 36. Supporting the learner's individual growth	.873
6 New learning environments 32. Confronting multiculturalism	.906

33. Readiness for media education 34. Self-regulated learning 31. Mastering the curriculum's academic content 38. Developing applications of modern information technology 16. Promoting equity of the sexes 29. Researching one's own work 27. Revising students' learning environments 15. Intercultural education 35. Critical reflection on one's own work	

Table 3. Example of qualitative data analysis

Quote	**Subcategories**	**Main categories**
New teachers need space to find suitable ways of engaging with their work and being a well-rounded adult for students. Fortunately, there is more than one way of teaching, offering many opportunities in all subjects, so we need to make space to "let a thousand flowers blossom." New teachers should also be encouraged to trust themselves and to be who they are, as well as always being nearby if/when questions arise.	- Making independent pedagogical decisions - Finding and maintaining one's own teaching style and approach	Independent working
	- Being an adult for students	Accountability and responsibilities

Table 4. Ten most emphasized competences

Support Needs	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
7. Working with a student welfare group	104	3.85	.747
37. Acting in conflict situations (e.g., mobbing)	104	3.79	.746
2. Managing classroom interaction	104	3.64	.799
18. Cooperation with parents	104	3.62	.828
3. Evaluating and grading students	104	3.42	.759
12. Differentiating teaching	104	3.41	.866
30. Evaluating students' learning capacity	104	3.39	.852
8. Developing the student's whole personality	104	3.37	.778
11. Developing the school curriculum	104	3.33	.908
10. Confronting school's changing circumstances	104	3.32	.839

Table 5. Dimensions and their mean values (in descending order)

Dimensions	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
2 Work outside the classroom	104	3.6731	0.61443
4 Cooperation with parents and colleagues	104	3.6442	0.73628
3 Holistic student support	104	3.3654	0.62408
5 Teacher as independent professional	104	2.9712	0.70307
6 New learning environments	104	2.8942	0.73628
1 Work in society and professional growth	104	2.6538	0.82166

Table 6. Dimensions and their elements

1 Work in society and professional growth
Interaction and local knowledge

Developing teachership
2 Work outside the classroom Perceiving the expansive nature of teaching Learning the practices of a school community Developing a school community
3 Holistic student support Supporting students' learning and schooling Supporting students' comprehensive individual growth
4 Cooperation with parents and colleagues Social skills Emotional strength Collaboration at school community level Collaboration in teaching
5 Teacher as independent professional Setting boundaries for one's own work Independent working Acting independently in complex, challenging, and unexpected situations Accountability and responsibility
6 New learning environments Implementing the latest curriculum

Appendix 1. All 40 competences listed in descending order

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
7. Working with a student welfare group	104	3.85	.747
37. Acting in conflict situations (e.g., mobbing)	104	3.79	.746
2. Managing classroom interaction	104	3.64	.799
18. Cooperation with parents	104	3.62	.828
3. Evaluating and grading students	104	3.42	.759
12. Differentiating teaching	104	3.41	.866
30. Evaluating students' learning capacity	104	3.39	.852
8. Developing the student's whole personality	104	3.37	.778
11. Developing the school curriculum	104	3.33	.908
10. Confronting school's changing circumstances	104	3.32	.839
6. Administrative tasks (information letters, reports, etc.)	104	3.31	.837
36. Supporting the learner's individual growth	104	3.30	.774
13. Preparing students for daily life	104	3.28	.841
9. Developing one's own educational philosophy	104	3.27	.766
14. Preparing students for future society	104	3.18	.901
17. Self-evaluation of one's own teaching	104	3.18	.879
4. Management of tasks outside the classroom (monitoring students during their breaks etc.)	104	3.17	.830
39. Cooperation with representatives of work life	104	3.13	.946
5. Working in a school community with teachers and other school staff	104	3.12	.809
32. Confronting multiculturalism	104	3.05	.969
34. Self-regulated learning	104	3.03	.908
27. Revising students' learning environments	104	3.02	.995
35. Critical reflection on one's own work	104	2.98	.870
40. Cooperation with representatives of cultural life	104	2.85	.943
33. Readiness for media education	104	2.79	.931
29. Researching one's own work	104	2.79	.910
38. Developing applications of modern information technology	104	2.78	.985
23. Lifelong professional growth	104	2.76	.950
15. Intercultural education	104	2.74	.836
31. Mastering the curriculum's academic content	104	2.73	.988
25. Working as a change agent in society	104	2.73	.968

1. Using teaching methods	104	2.73	.947
21. Becoming aware of the ethical basis of the teaching profession	104	2.65	.932
19. Planning one's teaching	104	2.65	.845
16. Promoting equity of the sexes	104	2.61	.852
20. Independent management of teachers' tasks	104	2.57	.810
22. Commitment to the teaching profession	104	2.56	.993
26. Cooperative action research	104	2.44	.974
24. Critical assessment of teacher education	104	2.41	.931
28. Postgraduate studies in education	104	2.39	.949
Valid N (listwise)	104		